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RUEHCG/AMCONSUL CHENNAI PRIORITY 7701
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 COLOMBO 000748

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DEPARTMENT FOR SCA/INS
MCC FOR D NASSIRY AND E BURKE

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [PTER](#) [PHUM](#) [MOPS](#) [CE](#)

SUBJECT: SRI LANKA: PRESIDENT SEEKS TO NEUTRALIZE SINHALESE
NATIONALIST PARTY AS AN OPPOSITION FORCE

Classified By: Ambassador Robert O. Blake, Jr., for reasons 1.4(b,d).

11. (C) SUMMARY: Since the extremist Sinhalese party Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna (JVP) withdrew official support for the President in April 2006, President Rajapaksa has been working to establish a measure of indirect control over the party and sap its ability to challenge his policies. The President has employed JVP insider and Member of Parliament Wimal Weerawansa to weaken and manipulate the party's leadership structure. The President and Weerawansa have successfully damaged the political careers of several prominent JVP figures. According to Embassy contacts, the president's eventual goal is to establish Weerawansa as the leader of the JVP, a move that he hopes would eliminate the JVP as a viable opposition force. The President's efforts to create a tamer opposition by installing an ally as JVP leader has only limited prospects for success, however. It is unlikely that the JVP, even under a "friendly" leader, would refrain from criticizing the President on certain issues, particularly the peace process and corruption. End Summary.

Creating a "Friendlier" Opposition

12. (C) Since the JVP withdrew support for the President in April 2006, President Rajapaksa has been working to establish indirect control of the party and weaken its ability to challenge his policies. However, he has had to employ other tactics than those he used to woo the United National Party (UNP) "crossovers" -- offers of power and perks. JVP members have proven more difficult to co-opt. Instead, the President has been working to weaken and manipulate the party's leadership structure.

13. (C) The President has several reasons for wanting to neutralize the JVP. Because of its control over certain unions, the JVP has a unique ability to mobilize street action. For example, they have threatened to hold a general strike in June to protest the rising cost of living and the Government's failure to respond to a recent report on

corruption in public enterprises. The JVP also competes with the President's party for the Sinhalese nationalist vote base. The President will want to keep the JVPs criticism muted, or he will risk losing more of these voters to the JVP. Most important, the President knows well that he received very few votes from minority Tamils and Muslims in his November 2005 election and depended almost exclusively on Sinhalese Buddhist votes for his slender majority over UNP leader Ranil Wickremesinghe. He must try to prevent the JVP from distancing itself too much from him, since he will need its voters' support again if he hopes to be re-elected.

An Ally on the Inside

14. (C) The President has employed the help of JVP insider and parliamentary floor leader Wimal Weerawansa to weaken the JVP. The President has used Weerawansa as a source for information on JVP internal matters, as well as damaging personal data on several key JVP leaders. According to Embassy contacts, the president's eventual goal is to establish Weerawansa as the leader of the JVP, a move that he hopes would eliminate the JVP as a true opposition force.

Undermining JVP Leaders

15. (C) The President and Weerawansa have inflicted damage on the political careers of several prominent JVP figures. The first was JVP trade unionist and MP Siripala Amarasinghe. The President, through his brother and advisor Basil Rajapaksa, used information from Weerawansa to highlight

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Amarasinghe's misappropriation of JVP trade union funds. Amarasinghe resigned from Parliament, giving one more seat to the ruling Sri Lanka Freedom Party, and is now employed at the Presidential Secretariat. The next target was JVP MP Nandana Gunathilaka, seen by many as the eventual successor to the party leadership. The President, after cultivating a dispute between Gunathilaka and Weerawansa, offered Gunathilaka overseas tours and other perks until he eventually dropped his active involvement in the JVP. JVP stalwart Kumar Gunaratnum left Sri Lanka with his family when he learned that the police force's Criminal Investigation Division was investigating him for corruption based on information supplied by Weerawansa. JVP MP Anura Dissanayake told us that the President and Weerawansa are now putting pressure on JVP leader Somawansa Amarasinghe to step down by gradually excluding him from party matters. The President and Weerawansa also are fostering criticism of Amarasinghe for leaving the country in the aftermath of the JVP's armed insurrection in the late eighties, claiming he abandoned the party during difficult times.

The "Secret Plan"

16. (C) The President recently told a group of journalists that JVP MP Anura Dissanayake and sacked former SLFP ministers Mangala Samaraweera and Sripathi Sooriyarachchi are toying with the idea of an alliance with UNP leader Wickremesinghe. According to our contacts, the President is fanning these rumors in an effort to damage Dissanayake's relations with the rest of the JVP leadership. Dissanayake earlier earned the President's animosity by revealing fraudulent legal and financial transactions conducted by the President's elder brother Chamal while he was Minister of Agriculture. There is ample evidence of a growing rift between Dissanayake and the rest of the JVP, and the President's growing influence over the party. For example, Dissanayake decided not to join the JVP's demonstrations at the British High Commission in mid-May. The protests, over the UK's decision to freeze debt relief and a UK parliamentary debate on Sri Lanka, took place at the President's request, according to Embassy contacts. (In

fact, protests are normally kept at a distance from the British High Commission because of its location directly across the street from the President's office and residence.)

17. (C) COMMENT: The President's efforts to create a tamer opposition by installing an ally as JVP leader may succeed, but to a limited extent. It is unlikely that the JVP, even under a "friendly" leader, would refrain from criticizing the President on certain issues. For example, fundamental opposition to the peace process is part of the JVP credo that it cannot afford to abandon. The JVP has also been a leader in Parliament in seeking to investigate government corruption. Moreover, Rajapaksa's backing of Wimal Weerawansa and not-so-secret efforts to undermine prominent JVP members has the potential to backfire, creating resentment against Weerawansa and greater opposition to the President within the JVP.

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